New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1951

Volume XII, Number 18 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of October 1, 1951

1951 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared In These Volumes

1950 Vol.

Stage Play	*Page*
*Affairs of State	267
Arms and the Man	235
Bell, Book and Candle	206
Black Chiffon	261
Bless You All	170
*Call Me Madam	243
Captain Brassbound's Conversion	157
Cocktail Party (The)	376
Country Girl (The)	210
Enemy of the People (An)	154
*Guys and Dolls	185
Happy Time (The)	370
King Lear	160
Lady's Not for Burning (The)	213
Member of the Wedding (The)	397
Out of This World	166
Pardon Our French	254
Peep Show	285
Peter Pan	306
Ring Round the Moon	189
Season in the Sun	258
Twentieth Century	163

•

1949 Vol.

*Diamond Lil	369
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes	198
*South Pacific	312

•

1948 Vol.

Kiss Me, Kate	91
Mister Roberts	338
Where's Charley?	197

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 1, 1951*

1951 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1951

Reviews Appear in This Volume

Stage Play	*Page*	*Stage Play*	*Page*
Angel in the Pawnshop	380	Long Days (The)	288
Angels Kiss Me	297	Make a Wish	294
Autumn Garden (The)	325	Mary Rose	328
*Bagels and Yox	238	Mikado (The)	370
Billy Budd	353	*Moon Is Blue (The)	322
*Borscht Capades	235	Night Music	300
Courtin' Time	254	Not for Children	348
Cox and Box	341	Oklahoma!	257
Darkness at Noon	388	Out West of Eighth	232
Dream Girl	271	Peer Gynt	373
L'Ecole des Femmes	307	Pirates of Penzance (The)	341
Flahooley	264	Razzle Dazzle	339
Four Twelves Are 48	384	Romeo and Juliet	318
Getting Married	268	*Rose Tattoo (The)	363
Gondoliers (The)	351	Royal Family (The)	392
Gramercy Ghost	281	School for Wives (The)	307
Green Bay Tree (The)	368	Second Threshold	398
Green Pastures (The)	312	*Seventeen	250
H.M.S. Pinafore	361	Small Hours (The)	344
High Ground (The)	336	Springtime Folly	331
House of Bernarda Alba (The)	395	Springtime for Henry	315
Idiot's Delight	260	*Stalag 17	274
Iolanthe	347	Taming of the Shrew (The)	284
*King and I (The)	304	Ti-Coq	358
King of Friday's Men (The)	334	*Tree Grows in Brooklyn (A)	291
King Richard II	376	Trial by Jury	361
*Lace on Her Petticoat	242	*Twilight Walk	228
Little Blue Light (The)	278	*Two on the Aisle	246

CRITICS' CIRCLE AWARD 302

Theatre Openings

"Twilight Walk"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of October 1, 1951*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK MIRROR

All Reviews copyrighted by the newspapers and reproduced by permission.

Yearly Subscription $25.00

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS, Inc., 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

"Twilight Walk"

New York World-Telegram
and
The [illegible] Sun

September 25, 1951

Cast's High Point Of 'Twilight Walk'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The company that offers "Twilight Walk" does a fine job of making an evening's diversion of it.

If stronger terms do not suit the occasion, it is not the fault of the people in sight, but of the play itself. Nowadays everybody is an authority on thrillers, thanks to radio and television. "Twilight Walk" has the chief strike against it of unoriginality. Milder faults are wordiness and inaction.

Despite this, it is performed with ominous conviction and a sort of lazy suspense that keeps you interested if never on the seat's edge.

Clear-Cut Path.

Given a series of strangled girls, a curious and daring young lady writer of true murder stories, and a pampered young man with an overly adoring mother, you can write your own climax.

As soon as these elements are lined up, it is obvious where they must lead, and they do. The characters are types who talk in abstractions, rather than individuals with specific attitudes. They like to sit tossing chapter headings at each other, as night falls in Central Park.

Directing the play, Paul Stewart has done a crafty job of making the characters real. Instead of dressing them up with tricks, he keeps them simple and so casual you might actually be overhearing most of the dialogue. When outbursts come, they rock you with no trouble at all.

No Legal Revenge.

Nancy Kelly is the star, as the writer who thinks legal revenge, demanded by the police, should be replaced by medical care for unbalanced criminals.

Whatever else she may have as an actress (like beauty of face and figure), Miss Kelly's outstanding theatrical virtue is a rare gift for the illusion of conviction. She can read the airiest sort of line and make you think her whole life depends on convincing you of its immediate truth. You believe it, too, because she does so much.

Charles Proctor comes from the play's Texas tryout to make a Broadway debut as the spoiled young neurotic. He projects the troublemaker with subtle symptoms, rigid stillness or slow squirming, and speaks with an apologetic giggle and words that spurt out as if they were coughed. It is a most believable portrayal.

Properly Shocking.

Ann Shoemaker is quite frightening, and should be, as the boy's mother. She tells of her own appalling behavior, such as tucking her grown son into bed, with such sweetness and concern that while she speaks, it all seems normal. In time, you want to run from her.

Walter Mathau is successful at making the detective disagreeable, though hardly tolerable, and Walter Brooke has the grace to play Miss Kelly's very normal fiance as just that and nothing more.

In smaller bits, Virginia Vincent won a fine hand last night as a girl making her prissy way down the last mile, and Anna Berger scored as a television fiend.

Paul Morrison has designed a set with an arched proscenium through which you might be observing the play from inside an underpass in the park.

"TWILIGHT WALK"

Play by A. B. Shiffrin; staged by Paul Stewart; settings by Paul Morrison; presented by Richard W. Krakeur at the Fulton Theatre, September 24, 1951. The cast:

Ronnie Brewster.....Charles Proctor
Clark Wilson....Walter Brooke
Mrs. Kramer.....Anna Berger
1st Little Girl.....Pauline Hahn
2nd Little Girl..Rosemarie Sheer
Woman.....Genevieve Frizzell
1st Old Man..Joseph Leberman
2nd Old Man.....Nathaniel Sack
Shoeshine Boy...Philip Hepburn
Kate Scott.....Nancy Kelly
Mrs. Brewster..Ann Shoemaker
Sam Dundee....Walter Matthau
Young Man.....Joseph Roman
Rosie Callahan..Virginia Vincent
Policeman.....Leo Lucker

Synopsis: Scene: Somewhere in Central Park. Time: The present. Late summer. Act I. Late afternoon. Act II. Next day. Late afternoon. Act III. Next day. Twilight.

DAILY NEWS

September 25, 1951

Another Killer Loose in the Park In 'Twilight Walk,' but Don't Worry

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The stage season is improving. Last evening at the Fulton Theatre there was a play—"Twilight Walk"—in which actors could act and for which the playwright—A. B. Shiffrin—wrote words. After my recent adventures in playgoing, I am tempted to call this one a masterpiece, but shan't. Instead, I'll call it a thriller which could be better than it is.

The first play of Mr. Shiffrin's that I ran into was a little fantasy which put up a brave struggle, "Angel in the Pawnshop." I admired it. I admire this new one somewhat but not entirely; Mr. Shiffrin does have the ability, as a playwright, to make characters talk like people. You would never know how rare this ability is if you weren't a drama reviewer who went to every play every season.

Hates His Mother.

"Twilight Walk" deals with a psychopathic killer who is loose in Central Park. His victims are females who become slightly ravished and then, as soon as possible, dead from strangulation. This fellow is making Central Park quite untenable, so naturally the police are interested because if people stop coming to Central Park there will be no need for any police there.

psychopathic killer is sitting on a park bench reading a book practically all the time. This young man, played by a newcomer from Margo Jones' academy in Dallas, Tex., Charles Proctor, wants to kill a female every couple of days because he hates his mother. He hates his mother because she loves him in a dominating way. But, instead of taking the direct route, which would be to kill his mother and to stop Mr. Shiffrin from writing the play before Act I Scene I, he has to become a psychopath.

A Victim Lacking.

Mr. Proctor acts his role very well—well enough to put me in mind of Emlyn Williams in such hellish deeds as "Night Must Fall." But I was held by, and interested in, such thrillers as "Night Must Fall" and "Angel Street"—and only interested in last evening's "Twilight Walk." I shall try to give Playwright Shiffrin my reason for this doleful conclusion: He has a good enough killer, but he has no victim staked out. One knows practically from the beginning of the play that Miss Kelly will be put in jeopardy—but one also knows that she will escape the clutches of the youthful strangler. In a really first class thriller, one should never know what is going to happen to the heroine.

However, "Twilight Walk" is, professionally, good theatre. Paul Stewart's direction is vivid and effective, the cast is good and Paul Morrison's Central Park setting is dramatically fitting. If I were Mr. Shiffrin, I shouldn't be too discouraged by a notice like this one, for he can make stage conversation sound lively. That's the makings of a playwright.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

September 25, 1951

By Bert McCord

Night Follows Fast

The pathological ingredients that go to make up a juvenile sex killer are examined in detail in "Twilight Walk," which came to the Fulton last night. The A. B. Shiffrin play belongs in a category which has come to be known as a psychological melodrama. This one can perhaps be described more accurately as a psychiatric melodrama. While there is much to be said for psychiatry, in terms of the theater it has driven melodrama off the stage. "Twilight Walk" is not successful as a play, nor, I suspect, is it effective psychiatry.

Set beneath a little bridge in Central Park, the Shiffrin play attempts an impassioned plea for more understanding treatment of minds that are criminal only because they are diseased. The argument that only by curing such minds, or at least using them as guinea pigs in a therapeutic effort to prevent the disease from taking root in others, is presented and then repeated over and over again throughout the evening. Little doubt is left as to the author's sincerity, but he has been unable to submerge his thesis into a play that one can care very much about.

"Twilight Walk" is not intended to be a whodunnit. The identity of the killer is known to the audience a few moments after the curtain rises on the first scene. He is a young man whose possessive mother has already driven his father to throw himself under a train and whose constant mothering stifles him. A plain-clothes man detailed to the park on special duty wants only to get his hands on the boy and give him a dose of his own medicine. A progressive girl in search of material for a magazine story on the sex crimes tries vainly to make him realize that his blunt methods can do no good. Divining the identity of the killer, she is in the process of talking to him her way when the plain-clothes man enters to put an end to the matter in his own fashion.

Out of a mixture of good and bad dialogue, Mr. Shiffrin has managed to create a number of playable characters and he is generally well served by the cast. In the most difficult role of the magazine writer, Nancy Kelly has to be so repetitive that she has a hard time not becoming downright monotonous, but is saved by her appearance. As the juvenile killer, Charles Proctor has the kind of role that youngsters in the theater dream about. He has his moments, but falls off in the climactic scene with the girl. In another extremely good role, Walter Matthau is fine as the plain-clothes man. Virginia Vincent is effective in a Judy Holliday-like part, while Anna Berger has fun as a television addict.

"Twilight Walk," in short, is a talky play which does not succeed in creating the suspense that it promises. And to this observer, whose knowledge of the field is limited to casual drawing room conversations, the psychiatric aspects of the motivation and argument seemed shallow indeed. Also, the author will probably be surprised to learn that at least one playgoer's sympathies lay with the plain-clothes man's solution to the problem of the evening.

The New York Times

September 25, 1951

Nancy Kelly Appears as a Student of Crime in A. B. Shiffrin's Melodrama 'Twilight Walk'

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Although A. B. Shiffrin's detective drama is literate, it is not interesting. "Twilight Walk" he calls it in the well-acted version that opened at the Fulton last evening. To summarize the plot, most of the police in New York are trying to find a murderer who has gotten into the bad habit of strangling women in Central Park. They are adopting the obsolete police methods of using their eyes and feet.

Collaborating with one of the chief characters in the play, Mr. Shiffrin uses psychiatry. This department is happy to report on good authority that it is good psychiatry. No one should venture into the theatre nowadays without a psychiatrist in constant attendance. Dr. Louis Berg, the psychiatrist in the seat to the left last evening, a student of the drama as well as the psyche, says that scientifically "Twilight Walk" is okay. The murderer is a very sick young man and should have shock treatments at once.

* * *

No matter how authoritative Mr. Shiffrin's diagnosis is, his drama is a slow-moving, prolix case-history with little dramatic suspense. Despite the fact that one of his characters gets murdered and another has to scuttle, for her life and honor, the general impression the drama leaves is that nothing happens. For sick people are not thrilling criminals. They are victims; they lack free will. What you need in the theatre for real excitement is a normal, healthy murderer who enjoys his work and has no misgivings or regrets. A little robbery is as sound a motive as any.

Mr. Shiffrin has one bad habit. He keeps interrupting himself. He has no sooner got started on an idea that he lets one of his characters talk him out of it. They are a quarrelsome lot of people who are always at loggerheads and keep the play from moving in one direction for more than five minutes at a time. He is a facile writer of bits; but, as in his "Angel in the Pawnshop," he does not seem to master a drama as a whole.

The elusiveness of the drama is a pity because the cast is attractive, and most of the parts are well acted. Like Mr. Shiffrin, Paul Stewart, who directed the performance, has no great skill in animating a whole production, but he has a knack for details. "Twilight Walk" contains a number of pungent scenes played with a good deal of casual grace.

Nancy Kelly, handsome as ever, plays the part of a lay psychiatrist with decision, and has good taste in her clothes. As the ailing homicide, Charles Proctor, who played the part originally in Dallas, gives a particularly skillful and discerning performance. Walter Matthau is amusing as a cynical cop; he knows how to get all the acid flavor out of his dialogue.

* * *

Virginia Vincent makes something quite ingratiating out of one brief conversation on a park bench. As the overbearing mother of the murderer, Ann Shoemaker conveys sound, maternal anxiety, and Walter Brooke is an agreeable newspaper reporter, although apparently not from THE TIMES.

"Twilight Walk" looks inviting. Paul Morrison has made a fine open-air setting out of some Central Park motives, and lighted it beautifully. If it were not for the script, the occasion would be generally enjoyable. But Mr. Shiffrin's approach is too scientific for fun.

Journal-American

September 25, 1951

It Fails to Thrill The Way It Tries

By ROBERT GARLAND

The new season again opened last night. And in undiluted English. At the Fulton, Richard Krakeur presented Nancy Kelly in "Twilight Walk," with Charles Proctor as the first of the featured players. The others were Ann Shoemaker, Walter Brooke and Walter Matthau. The staging was by Paul Stewart. The setting, in Central Park, was by Paul Morrison. The time was today.

The author, A. B. Shiffrin, first tried out his play in Dallas' theatre-in-the-round. It was in January of this year. The critics, if I remember, liked it. They liked it almost as much as they liked Tennessee Williams' "Summer and Smoke," to which it was compared. The element of suspense, the motivating lines, made up for the lack of scenery. It scored.

It scored after a fashion in Forty-sixth Street. But only after a fashion. Charles Proctor, who came from Texas with it—it changed its name from "The Willow Tree" to "Twilight Park" and then to "Twilight Walk"—played the leading male role, while Nancy Kelly, late of "Season in the Sun," played a heroine who ought to have been protected from herself.

And it left me wondering how many girls Ronnie Brewster had to kill before he was put away for safe keeping. Or merely put away.

He Wasn't Worth It

The heroine who ought to have been protected from herself was Kate Scott. She was in love with Clark Wilson, the parked newspaperman. Or kind of in love with him. Her real love was murderers, for whom she felt sorry. Lock them up if they slaughter too many bystanders. But treat them kindly. They only kill because people fail to understand.

There was much talk about killers in general and Ronnie Brewster in particular. "Twilight Walk" made no mystery about the identity of the maniac. He was Ronnie Brewster and Ronnie Brewster was he. He got that way because his mother was too fond of him. Therefore he should not be treated harshly. At the Fulton,